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NEWS RELEASE

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Rep. Nethercutt statement on war resolution

WASHINGTON – U.S. Rep. George Nethercutt (R-Wash.) delivered the following remarks on the House floor today on the resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq:

“It is appropriate that we fully discuss here the most serious responsibility entrusted to Congress, authorizing the President to use force in defense of our nation. The decision by Congress to authorize the deployment of the U.S. military requires somber analysis and sober consideration, but this is not a discussion we should delay. The President has presented to the American people a compelling case for intervening in Iraq, and this body has acted deliberately in bringing to the House floor a resolution that unequivocally expresses our support for the Commander in Chief.

“The threat to our national security from Iraq could not be more apparent. It is perhaps best illustrated by the size and scope of Iraqi efforts to develop and deploy weapons of mass destruction, a horrifying capability only recognized after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The United Nations Special Commission on Iraq succeeded in destroying thousands of chemical munitions, chemical agents, and precursor chemicals. Iraq admitted to developing offensive biological weapons, including botulinum, anthrax, aflatoxin, clostridium, and ricin. Inspectors accounted for over 800 Soviet-supplied Scud missiles and 43 of 45 chemical and biological warheads that Iraq admitted to. About 40 clandestine nuclear weapons facilities were discovered and destroyed.

“Yet, this toxic list describes only what UN Inspectors were able to detect in the face of official Iraqi resistance, deception and denial. For example, UNSCOM could not account for 31,600 chemical munitions, 500 mustard gas bombs, and 4,000 tons of chemical weapon precursors. Such was the status of the Iraqi weapons program a decade ago. In the intervening period, development efforts have continued unabated, and indeed have accelerated following the withdrawal of UN inspectors.

“Iraq has repeatedly demonstrated a resolve to develop deadly weapons of mass destruction, and, more horrifyingly, to use them. Saddam Hussein murdered 5,000 of his own citizens in Halabja, and injured 10,000 more, in a gas attack. 20,000 Iranians died terrible deaths in clouds of mustard gas and nerve agents. In breach of U.N. imposed sanctions, Iraq has continued to develop long-range missiles that expand the threat that these toxins pose to the world community. As the world waits for compliance with any of the 16 Security Council Resolutions that are presently in abeyance, this capability grows.

“Perhaps in different hands the deadly arsenal possessed by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq would be less of an imminent threat. To be sure, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction deterred the United States and the Soviet Union from direct conflict for more than forty years. But such a doctrine is dependent upon rational actors and an expectation that civilized nation-states seek the preservation of their citizenry. Such assumptions fail in Iraq, a country that under Saddam Hussein has demonstrated an unabated hatred of the United States and a willingness to sacrifice and murder its citizens in the interests of the ruling clique.

“This authorization of force is at some level, recognition of the ongoing state of war with Iraq. Conflict with Iraq has never truly ceased since the conclusion of the Gulf War, and coalition aircraft supporting Operation Northern and Southern Watch have been fired upon thousands of times. It is revealing to examine the record of only the last three weeks, since Iraq sent a letter to the United Nations expressing a willingness to resume weapons inspections. Sixty-seven attempts have been made to down coalition aircraft in this period; 406 attempts have been made this year. It is beyond comprehension to believe that this body would argue for further deliberation, further study, further diplomacy, were our pilots to be attacked so in any other place on the globe. Yet, we have tolerated this low-level conflict for nearly a decade.

“Opponents of this resolution have responded by asking, ‘Why now?’

“The U.S. has struggled against the tepid resolutions and the general inactivity of the international community for a decade. To what avail, but a rearmed, emboldened dictator, confident in his ability to flaunt international law, willing to flex his might against lesser states in the region, and capable of intimidating all others

“Regime change cannot happen through domestic posturing. Disarmament requires more than hopes and good wishes.

“Acting in concert with our allies is inarguably the first and best choice, but we must remember that the President has sworn to ‘preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.’

“Ultimately, the President's actions must be guided by America's national security interests. Where broader regional interests intersect with our security concerns, we should welcome assistance and combine efforts in the pursuit of liberty and freedom. But we must not predicate our actions on global opinion. When necessary, the United States must be prepared to act alone.

“On Tuesday, December 9, 1941, two days after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt addressed the nation and reflected upon the coming challenges. He noted:

‘There is no such thing as impregnable defense against powerful aggressors who sneak up in the dark and strike without warning . . . we cannot measure our safety in terms of miles on any map.’

“In 1941, Congress stood with the President and promised full support to protect and defend our nation. Today, we must do no less.”

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